DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 277 490 PS 016 289

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TITLE A Comparison of Honesty for Home Care, Day Care, and Preschool Children.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 20p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Day Care; Early Childhood Education; *Family Environment; Group Experience; *Moral Values; *Peer Influence; *Preschool Children; Pretests Posttests; *Social Development
IDENTIFIERS *Honesty

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to measure the effects of day care and preschool experience on children's measured honesty, and to compare program participants' honesty scores with those of children cared for exclusively at home. It was hypothesized that children who had been in a child care program for several months would score lower when asked to give their solution to an honesty dilemma than children cared for at home, because their greater exposure to peers would expand their behavioral repertoire. Subjects were 59 children in three different child care settings, preschool, day care, and home, who were pre-tested concerning their understanding of honesty, their definitions of honest behavior, and their judgment of what their behavior would be in an honesty dilemma. Children were retested 3 months later. Although pre-test scores did not differ among the three groups, post-test scores for children in day care and preschool were lower than post-test scores of children in home care. Results are discussed in reference to the increased social awareness and maturity often found among children in early childhood programs. (Author/RH)

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A Comparison of Honesty for Home Care, Day Care, and Preschool Children

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Running head: COMPARISON OF HONESTY

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PS 016289

Abstract

Fifty-nine children, including eighteen children (ten girls and eight boys) just entering preschool, nineteen children (eight girls and eleven boys) just entering or reentering day care, and twenty-two children (ten girls and twelve boys) in home care were asked to give their solutions to an honesty dilemma. They were tested upon entrance to preschool for the preschool subsample, and upon entrance to day care for the day care subsample. All three subsamples were then retested three months later. Although pretest scores did not differ among the three groups, post-test scores for program children (those in day care and preschool) were lower than post-test scores for the home care children. The results were discussed in terms of the increased social awareness and maturity often found with children in early childhood programs.

A Comparison of Honesty for Home Care, Day Care and Preschool Children

Clarke-Stewart and Fein (1983) concluded that children involved in childcare programs, including day care and preschool, are more socially mature than children reared exclusively at home. According to Clarke-Stewart and Fein (1983), program children score higher than home care children on measures of cooperation, friendliness, responsiveness, and social confidence. Nonetheless, these authors note that program children's social maturity also may be expressed in negative ways, with day care and preschool children scoring less polite, agreeable, compliant, and respectful of others than home care children.

To our knowledge, no one has addressed honesty, a social value, as it relates to an early childhood population. Nonetheless, its societal implications need no explication. Berndt, McCartney, Caparulo, and Moore (1983) examined honesty scores in middle childhood and found that children respond less positively (i.e., more dishonestly) to an honesty dilemma after discussing it with peers than when they are asked to respond to the dilemma without peer corroboration. Thus, in this study, peer corroboration somehow encouraged decisions which were more aligned with self-interest and less honest than those produced by noncollaborative thinking.

It is unclear if Berndt et al.'s (1983) research may be

generalized to the preschool years. Piaget (1965) asserted that young children disregarded honesty, or specifically, told lies, as a natural part of egocentric thought, being unable to separate intentions from actions and realism from animism or artificialism. Consonant with Piagetian theory, it seems then that preschool youngsters, similar to children in middle childhood, would also have difficulties with honesty dilemmas, but not because of peer contagion. Rather, their problems would result due to their age-specific egocentrism implying that these difficulties with honesty dilemmas would occur equally often without, but also with, peer contact. Thus, children in preschool, day care, and home care, regardless of the amount of peer contact, would score similarly when confronted with an honesty dilemma simply because they are assumed to share the same developmental characteristic critical to honesty judgments; namely, egocentrism.

Nonetheless, it is uncertain whether the greater social awareness attributed to program children would then have an effect on their response to an honesty dilemma. Further, since it is assumed that program children have extended participation with peers, it is problematic whether this association would influence children's perceptions of an honesty dilemma.

The purpose of this study was to measure the effects of entry into a child program, both day care and preschool, on children's honesty scores and to compare these scores with scores of children

who had always been in home care and remained in home care. Our hypothesis was that children, after having been in a child program for several months, would score lower on an honesty dilemma than home care children because their greater exposure to peers would give them more alternative behaviors. We did not feel that program children would become, in truth, less honest; however, we believed that they might appear that way on an honesty dilemma after extended exposure to peers because they had developed greater social awareness, or rather, were learning that there were many alternative ways to behave in any situation. The children in the Berndt et al. (1983) study scored lower on the honesty dilemma after their peer discussions focused specifically on possible outcomes to that dilemma. We did not involve peer consultation regarding the honesty dilemma in our design. Rather, we believed that lower honesty scores would occur with the program children after extended peer contact simply because this peer contact, as well as other factors specific to child programs, would give the children exposure to peer values and to alternative ways of doing things.

Method

Children in three different child care settings, day care, preschool, and home care, were pre- and post-tested concerning their understanding of honesty, their definitions of honest behavior, and their judgment of what their behavior would be in an

honesty dilemma.

Participants

Preschool

Eighteen children, ten boys and eight girls attending the university preschool, received parental permission to participate in this study. Their ages ranged from 49 months to 61 months, mean = 55.9 months, sd = 3.9 months. The children were white and lived with both biological parents in intact, two-parent homes. They attended preschool four days a week for 2 1/2 hours each day. For the rest of their day they were cared for by their mothers at home. Their mothers were not employed outside the home. The children were tested at the preschool within two weeks of their entrance into preschool. They had never attended preschool before this experience.

Family income ranged from $15,000 to over $55,000, mean = $30,000, sd = $9,000. Mother's education level ranged from 12 years of schooling to 20 years, mean = 15.2 years, sd = 2.1 years. Father's education level ranged from 12 years to 20 years, mean = 16.8 years, sd = .653. Preschool families averaged four children per family.

Day Care

Nineteen day care children, eight girls and eleven boys, received parental permission to participate in the study. They ranged in age from 42 months to 60 months, mean = 51.7 months, sd =

4.7 months. All children were white and lived with both biological parents in intact, two-parent homes. They attended day care for a total of 30 to 40 hours a week.

The children came from three day care centers in the area which were comparable to each other in terms of size, child-caregiver ratio, availability of materials, organization of space, caregiver education, and quality of activities. Four child developmentalists, using the criteria described above, rated the centers as low medium in quality. The centers all held current licenses issued by the state of Utah.

Initially it had been our intention to involve in the study only those children who had never attended day care before. We wanted to test them immediately upon their entrance into day care with a post-test three months later. After an extensive search of this and contiguous areas, we were able to find nine children, six boys and three girls, who fit this criteria. Thus, these children had never before been in day care and were just entering as they were recruited for the study.

The remaining ten children, five boys and five girls, were returning to the day care center in the fall after being cared for at home by a parent, older sibling, or babysitter during the summer months. All day care children were tested at the day care center within the first two weeks of their entrance or reentrance to day care.

The day care families averaged three children per family. Father's years of education ranged from 12 to 20 years, mean = 15 years, sd = 2.6 years. Mother's years of education ranged from 12 to 18 years, mean = 13.5 years, sd = 2 years. Family income ranged from $5,000 to $55,000, mean = $25,000, sd = $11,000.

Home Care

Twenty-two home care children, ten girls and twelve boys, ranging in age from 51 months to 62 months, mean = 56.5, sd = 2.9 months, composed the home care group. The home care children were white and lived with both biological parents in intact, two-parent homes. The home care children were cared for by their mothers in their own homes. They had never attended preschool. Their mothers did not work outside the home nor had they ever worked outside the home.

The home care families averaged over four siblings per family. Mother's years of education ranged from 12 to 16 years, mean = 12.8, sd = 1.2 years. Father's years of education ranged from 12 to 20 years, mean = 14.6, sd = 2.2 years. Annual family income ranged from $5,000 to $35,000, mean = $17,500, sd = $7,500.

Comparisons Between Groups on Demographic Measures

To determine similarities between subjects, separate univariate analyses of variance were run using as dependent variables family income, number of siblings, father's level of education, mother's

level of education and child's age. Independent variables were preschool, home care, and day care.

Family income: According to the results from a Kruskal-Wallis test, home care families had significantly lower incomes than preschool families, $X^2 = 7.567$ $p<.02$. Means: home care = 4.50, day care = 5.92, preschool = 6.94. Day care families did not differ significantly from either home care or preschool.

Father's education: A one-way analysis of variance was used for this and the remaining comparisons. Preschool fathers had the highest education. Day care and home care fathers did not differ from each other, $F = 5.6788$ (2,51 df) $p<.006$. Means: preschool = 4.39, day care = 2.71, home care = 2.75.

Mother's education: Preschool mothers had higher education than the other two groups, $F = 8.80$ (2,50 df) $p<.0006$. Means: preschool = 3.24, sd = 1.52; day care = 2.07, sd = 1.59; home care = 1.45, sd = .759. Day care and home care samples did not differ from one another.

Age of target child: Preschool and home care children were significantly older than day care children, $F = 8.6327$ (2,57 df) $p<.005$. Means (in months): preschool = 55.95, sd = 3.90; day care = 51.71, sd = 4.74; home care = 56.52, sd = 2.98. As will be reported later, the child's age correlated significantly and positively with honesty scores. Thus, age was used as a covariant in later analyses.

Number of siblings: Day care children had the fewest number of siblings, $F = 5.9396$ (2,50 df) $p<.005$. Means: preschool = 3.2, sd = 1.1; day care = 1.8, sd = 1.5; home care = 3.4, sd = 1.5. Preschool and home care children did not differ from one another.

Instrument

The honesty instrument was specifically developed for this study and was designed to assess a child's notion of honesty, his or her ability to identify an act as honest, and a child's judgment of his/her own behavior in several honesty dilemmas.

Reliability and Validity: The instrument was piloted on several subsamples of day care, home care and preschool children comparable to the children eventually used for the study. A new sample was used for each piloting. A panel of five professional child developmentalists individually assessed the items for clarity and their ability to be understood by children of this age. The panel also assessed the instrument for face validity. Test-retest reliability between time 1 and time 2 over a three-month period was $r = .382$ $p\leq.002$.

Honesty Dilemma: The child was invited to listen to a story about two puppets and some cookies. The child was shown both the puppets and the cookies and told that they could have a cookie after the discussion if they would like. The experimenter said, "I want to tell you a story about some puppets and some cookies. The puppets were brother and sister and their mother had just made some

yummy, juicy, chocolate chip cookies. Mmmm, didn't they smell good? The mother told the puppets that they could each have one, but only one, cookie. Then she went out of the room. The puppets weren't to have any more. They looked at the cookies. Oh, they looked so good! They wanted just one more. What would you do if your mother had just made some cookies and you wanted just one more? Well, the puppets took two chocolate chip cookies. Should they have taken one more cookie after their mother told them they could only have one? Then their mother came back. What would you tell your mother if you were one of the puppets? They said they did not take another cookie. Should they have done that? What would you do?"

The entire process of experimenter queries and child responses was tape recorded and coded afterwards by two female research assistants who were blind to the child care situation. Interrater reliability was 97.8 on all items.

The honesty instrument was not administered by itself but rather with several other tests of social awareness including sharing, helping, comforting, and civic awareness. The order of presentation of each test was fixed in a predetermined sequence.

Procedure

A pretest-post-test format was utilized for this study in order to determine the effect of entrance to day care and preschool upon the honesty judgments made by the children. The length of time

between the pre- and post-test was approximately three months, a span dictated by the length of time the preschool children were in the university laboratory.

Testing was accomplished by two trained female experimenters. The preschool children were tested in the preschool in a small unoccupied classroom. Likewise, the day care children were tested in the day care in an unoccupied classroom area. The home care children were tested at home in a quiet area of their home where they would not be disturbed. Since other values not being discussed in this article were assessed at the same time, each testing session lasted approximately twenty minutes.

Results

Pearson correlations coefficients were computed for the relationships between the honesty pre- and post-tests and the number of siblings, father's education, mother's education, family income, and the child's age. The honesty post-test was positively correlated with the child's age ($r = .454$, $p<.0005$), a factor which was controlled for in subsequent analyses, and with home care status ($r = .374$, $p<.002$). It was negatively correlated with day care status ($r = -.426$, $p<.0005$). The honesty pretest was significantly correlated with the honesty post-test ($r = .382$, $p<.002$), attesting to the test-retest reliability of the instrument.

Other significant correlations included father's education with

mother's education ($r = .53$, $p<.0005$), father's education with home care status ($r = .272$, $p<.026$) and father's education with preschool status ($r = .377$, $p<.003$). Mother's education was positively correlated with preschool status ($r = .49$, $p<.0005$) and negatively correlated with home care status ($r = -.395$, $p<.002$). Annual income was positively correlated both with the father's education ($r = .457$, $p<.0005$) and the mother's education ($r = .337$, $p<.008$). Income was also positively correlated with the preschool status ($r = .356$, $p<.007$) and negatively correlated with the home care status ($r = -.378$, $p<.003$). Number of siblings was also positively correlated with home care status ($r = .272$, $p<.027$) but negatively correlated with day care status ($r = -.441$, $p<.001$).

The data were plotted for curvilinearity with no curvilinear relationships found.

An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was done to check for heterogeneity of slopes between day care, home care, and preschool cells. This measure was nonsignificant, $F = .4770$, 1, 48 df, $p \leq .493$. A second analysis of covariance was performed to test for differences in the honesty pretest scores between home care, day care, and preschool groups. Since age was a significant predictor of honesty scores and since day care children differed significantly from the other two groups with regard to age, the child's age was used as a covariant in this model. The groups did not differ significantly on the honesty pretest ($F = .16640$, 2,

53df, p<.847). (Overall mean = 7.56; preschool = 7.56; day care = 7.23; home care = 7.66.)

A third analysis of covariance (2 [sex] X 3 [child care setting]) was performed with age as the covariant to test honesty post-test scores. Honesty post-test scores did differ significantly between the three child care groups (F = 3.7914, 2, 48 df, p<.03, preschool = 7.64; day care = 7.20; home care = 9.07). Results of a test of least significant differences indicated that preschool and day care scores were not significantly different from each other, but both did differ significantly from home test scores. The main effects of gender and the interaction of gender and child care setting were nonsignificant (Table 1).

Discussion

Although replication of any study is necessary before a definitive statement may be made concerning children's judgments of honesty, these data strongly suggest modifications to Piaget's notion of childhood egocentrism. It appears that preschool children can make judgments of honesty and, commensurate with Berndt et al. (1983), it also seems that these judgments are directly influenced by peer interaction or at least by involvement in a child program.

In the Berndt et al. study, children actually discussed the honesty dilemmas with each other with the result that after discussion, children's recommendations as to a course of action

became less honest. However, our research clearly indicates that even without direct discussion of honesty alternatives, children who spent extended time in a child program named less honest solutions to an honesty dilemma than children who did not have this weekly contact. We do not think this means that children in day care and preschool are less honest. Rather we believe the children's responses reflect greater social awareness about alternatives a child could pursue.

Clarke-Stewart and Fein (1983) indicate that children in childcare programs are less compliant with maternal directives or teacher demands than home care children. It is possible that our findings reflect the program child's reduced allegiance to adult standards. If program children were also tested at home on the honesty dilemma, it would be interesting to discover whether they would score more positively in a milieu more strongly influenced by their parents. Children away from home may feel less need to comply with values that they might normally endorse with parents at home.

It is also possible that the three different child care situations differ in the degree to which a social value such as honesty is discussed or reinforced. For example, children in a public context may feel more threatened or more pressure for attention, materials, and space than they do in a home setting. These types of potential stress may influence perceptions toward

honesty.

Perhaps our results turned out as they did because home care children, who were tested in the home, were tutored before their post-test responses by a parent who may have been listening to the pretest. For the home care children, we requested that the examiner be left alone with the target child during the testing; however, this does not totally preclude the parent from listening to the tasks and commenting on them afterwards. It is important to remember, however, that the honesty paradigm was imbedded in a battery of social awareness tests. Thus, it did not stand alone and would not be as prominent a point for discussion.

It is further possible after the testing period in the preschool and day care, that the children discussed the honesty paradigm with each other thereby replicating in a way Berndt et al.'s design and thus influencing their post-test responses. Again, the fact that the honesty measure appeared with four other measures makes that possibility less likely, but it does, nevertheless, still exist. In short, all three groups of children had the opportunity to discuss a testing situation of this type with parents.

It is important to realize that although face validity was obtained for the honesty dilemma, we have no indication of construct validity. Therefore, we do not know if children's responses on the honesty paradigm really portray their actions in a

similar real-life situation. To us, the results reflect Clarke-Stewart and Fein's (1983) observation that program children exhibit greater social awareness and maturity which is not always demonstrated in a positive fashion.

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Table 1. Analysis of Variance for Honesty Post-Test

Sources of Variation	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	P
Child's Age (Covariate)	1	78.3420	78.3420	15.0123	.010
Child Care Situation	2	30.8782	15.4391	3.7914	.030
Sex	1	5.3732	5.3732	.8225	.369
Child Care Setting X Sex	2	5.024	2.512	.5786	.565
Regression	6	119.6174	19.9363		
Error	48	208.3826	4.3413		
TOTAL		3848.00			